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ABSTRACT

This book examines children's many connections to animals and their developmental significance, exploring the growth of the human animal connection, and showing how children's innate interest in animals is shaped by their families and their social worlds, and may in turn shape the kind of people they will become. Chapter 1 documents how theory and research on children's development have ignored animals and suggests ways in which attention to children's animal connections recasts many issues in social and cognitive development. Chapter 2 traces the evolution of pet keeping, domestication of animals, and changes in the family that together have made children intimate partners with the animals who reside with them. Chapter 3 focuses on the emotional bond between child and pet, noting qualities of children's relationships with their pets similar to children's significant ties with humans and those that are distinctive. Chapter 4 goes into the classroom, home, yard, park, and zoo and asks what children might be absorbing from observing and interacting with living animals. Chapter 5 considers therapies for troubled children that incorporate contact with animals and nature. The chapter assesses the potential of and the unanswered questions about using animals to treat a wide range of problems, from extreme shyness to hyperactivity, to learning disabilities. Chapter 6 considers animals as symbols, both as offered up by adults for children and as products of children's imagination. Chapter 7 examines children's mistreatment of animals, possible links between animal abuse and family violence, and animal neglect and abandonment. Chapter 8 sketches a research, teaching, and program agenda based on a biocentric perspective for studying children's development and enriching their lives. The chapter focuses on deepening and shaping rather than discouraging children's intuitive affinity for other forms of life. (Contains extensive notes organized by chapter.) (HTH)

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